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Hotel of the Year – Independent

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2020 WINNER

The Queensberry hotel

The Queensberry hotel in Bath is the epitome of a well-run, independent hotel where the owners are at the heart of the business.

For the past 17 years, Laurence and Helen Beere have worked to put the four-AA-star, 29-bedroom property at the forefront of the boutique hotel market in Bath. During that time, they battled the 2008/2009 recession, before embarking on a £1.3m investment programme in 2012.

Renovation work in 2019 – combined with the hotel's Olive Tree restaurant being awarded a Michelin star in October 2018 – resulted in the business enjoying its most successful year. Occupancy during the summer months was 90%, with average room rates rising by 1% to give a revenue per available room increase of 6.3%. Meanwhile, restaurant bookings across the year increased by 40%. During this time, the Beeres worked on a marketing plan, supported by Wired Marketing, to help build the hotel's direct bookings. As a result, they achieved a 50% decrease in commission paid to Booking.com and a fall in travel agent commission from 2.2% to 5.6% of turnover.

The Beeres' focus is very much on creating a supportive environment for their 40-strong team, whose achievements are recognised and celebrated on a daily basis. Team bonding events include meals out, bowling, picnics and a summer barbecue at the Beeres' home, while every member of staff is encouraged to stay in the hotel and dine in the restaurant with a partner or friend twice a year.

Having achieved such a strong performance during 2019, the expectation was that 2020 was to be even better. But, of course, when the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases exploded, all that changed. Then, just four and a half hours after the hotel closed on 22 March, a day ahead of the announcement of a national

lockdown, a fire caused by an incorrectly wired extractor fan broke out in the hotel's kitchen.

Determined as ever, the Beeres pushed on through the £300,000 repair programme and reopening. Even the diagnosis of Covid-19 for both Laurence and Helen and their daughter Alice at the end of September failed to distract them from their plans. Thankfully, with everyone fully recovered, the hotel is doing well again. "We believe that this is a good business and that is why we have kept fighting," says Laurence.

WHAT THE JUDGES SAID

"Year after year the hotel has continued to blossom with new offerings, new decorations and new awards. The Beeres have grown this business organically and they have ploughed everything they have and everything they are into it and the result is an amazing and successful small business in the middle of a very crowded hospitality market in Bath. The Queensberry is a shining example of the very best of hospitality in our country."

David Morgan-Hewitt

"The Queensberry hotel is a fine property that has carefully invested profits back into the business each year. The success of the property comes from the hard-working proprietors, who are always on-hand to ensure they and the team exceed guest expectations."

Jonathan Raggett

"The Beeres have continually invested in their product and striven for excellence. They epitomise and embody everything that this award represents for the independent hotel sector. It is clear that 2019 was a seminal year for them."

Dan Rose-Bristow

